**HUMANISM – A SUMMARY FOR TEACHERS AND SACRES**

**VALUES**

Humanists believe that morality is based on human nature, human society and human experience; it has not come from a god.

Humanists believe that moral values stem from the human need for happiness and the fact that we must live co-operatively together.

There is no evidence for life after death, and so humanists place a special value on this life and on making the best of it. They do not expect justice in another life, and so work for justice in this one.

Humanists try to follow the Golden Rule: treat other people as you would like them to treat you, avoid harming others.

Humanists value all human beings, celebrating both our common humanity and shared values, and the diversity of human culture. Prejudices based on race, gender, nation or belief should not be allowed to separate us.

Humanists believe that humans alone are responsible for sustaining and improving our quality of life on this planet.

**BELIEFS**

*Humanism is based on reason, not faith:*

- The humanist view of the universe does not depend on a belief in god or Gods. Humanists are agnostic (agnostic = without knowledge) because they think that we cannot know whether God exists or not. Because there is no evidence for the existence of God or for an after-life, humanists live their lives as atheists (a-theist = without god), and find other reasons for living good lives.

- Humanists do not have sacred texts, traditions, dogma, prophets, or any source of authority other than human experience. Humanists look for evidence before they believe things and like to think for themselves.

- Humanists believe that knowledge best advances through openness and co-operation, through experiment and observation, and through free enquiry and discussion.

- Humanists accept that science provides the best available explanations for the existence of the universe and life on earth. Humanists do not believe that the universe or earth were created.

**ACTIVITIES AND CEREMONIES**

There are no compulsory prescribed rituals for humanists. There are humanist ceremonies for weddings, baby-namings and funerals, for those who wish to mark these in a personal, appropriate and non-religious way.

- Humanists do not pray or worship.

- Because there is no dogma, ritual, or tradition in Humanism, humanists are free of the obligation to use particular objects or artefacts, or to practise unnecessary self-denial.

International Humanism has a symbol, “The Happy Human” (see top l h corner).

Humanists put their values into practice by actively supporting human rights campaigns and a range of charities.

**DEVELOPMENT**

Humanism has its roots over 2,500 years ago, when thinkers in Greece, China and India formulated the idea than humankind alone is responsible for its own welfare and development.

In the European Renaissance and Enlightenment, these ideas were revived and developed.

- The growth of knowledge about science, geology and evolution in the 18th and 19th centuries showed that there was no need for religion to explain the processes of nature.

- In the 19th and 20th centuries, humanists have campaigned for the rights of non-religious people, and developed organisations and ceremonies which provide for their values and beliefs.

**SOME INFLUENCES**

Many people have influenced the ideas and development of Humanism and had a humanist approach to life. They include:

- In the Ancient World: Aristotle, Confucius, Democritus, Epicurus, Protagorus, Socrates.

- The Enlightenment: Descartes, Diderot, David Hume, Thomas Paine, Voltaire, Mary Wollstonecraft.


For further information, see www.humanism.org.uk or contact the British Humanist Association, 1 Gower Street, WC1E 6HD, ☎ 020 7079 3580, info@humanism.org.uk.